

## A Gravity Falls Fanzine



Property  
FORD  
Of



Mabel Pines

Dipper



MABEL

LEE

Mason  
Pines





# Thank You

On behalf of everyone  
who worked on  
So Many Falls  
we want to thank you for  
buying our charity fanzine!  
We hope you enjoy the  
many stories and art  
hidden within it's  
pages.

- The Mods  
Grunkles

# Contributors

(In Order of Appearance)



Minty

minty-draws-cartoons 

Shima

 shima-draws  cosmic\_crossings





Orange Octopi

 OrangeOctopi7 



Do Dimension It

Rocloz

 Rocloz 



Mab

 themadqueenmab  Queen\_Mab

Starshine



GinAndShatteredDreams

 gin-and-shattered-dreams

TheSometimesWarrior

 runrundoyourstuff  TheSometimesWarrior

Stories Bring  
Us Home





H. Hellman  
[t](#)hellmandraws



Pirably  
[t](#)pirably [t](#)pirablyzeugs



Holly H.  
[t](#)eregyrn-falls [@](#)eregyrn



Miko  
[t](#)lazy-stars [@](#)lazy\_stars

Like Batman  
 And Robin

Amuk  
[t](#)kumeko [@](#)amuk

Mason Grey  
[@](#)garbagegnomes



Caitlin Pafford  
[@](#)toasty.momo [t](#)ToastyMarsh

Zoxiee  
[t](#)zoxiee [@](#)zoxieetweets



Portal to  
Relativity

Nour386

t nour386 t brightdrawings

Elle

t elle-arts i elodiechenart



Rocio

i hispanicin



Corpsecrow

i corpsecrow t



Zannolin

i zannolin t



Starry

t starryroyalty ✂

Magic in the  
Center of  
Everything

Sealbatross

t sealbatross t



Toasty

i rejectbread t



What We  
Would Undo

Inabsurd  
Inabsurd t

## Merch Artists

August  
t sinecosinewheel



DaniDarkArts

Instagram DaniDarkArts t



Taccoman

t Taccoman Twitter Forschart



Pirably  
t pirably t pirablyzeugs



Oxy  
Mal.oxy Malware\_Inc



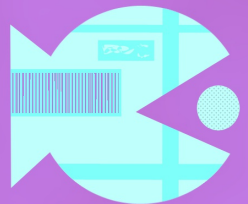
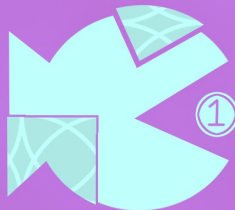
## Mods

Oxy  
Mal.oxy Malware\_Inc

Lora B  
lorablackmane

Nour386  
Nour386 Brightdrawings

Silver  
Sliverstrands Silverstrands000















# Do Dimension It

*By Orange Octopi*

The Pines boys jumped into the rift, calling Mabel's name. Unfortunately, there was no sign of her.

Dipper started to hyperventilate. "Ohmigosh, Mabel's lost in the Multiverse! She could be literally anywhere! W-what if we never find her!? What if she's hurt? What if—"

The boy's panic was cut short as Stan pulled out two more carabiners and clipped Dipper and Ford to the rope.

"Relax, kid, I've spent thirty years out here, things aren't as hopeless as you think. First off, let's make sure we don't lose anybody else."

"Stan, just how long is this rope?" Ford asked as he watched the rift and the tree they were anchored to drift farther and farther away. The rope remained as slack as ever.

"It's an infinity rope, it's as long as we need it to be."

"I didn't install that!" Ford raised his eyebrows in surprise. "And I'm fairly sure McGucket would have mentioned it if he'd developed something like that, much less added it to your arm."

"I got it out here." Stan explained, "Well, not *here*-here, but while I was out universe hopping. I just kinda stuck it onto the arm with some of your space glue."

"Just adding whatever you like without regard to the mechanics could compromise your arm's functionality!" Ford reprimanded his brother.

"First of all, it's my arm and I'll do what I want with it; second of all, it's still workin' just fine!"

"Guys, could we please have this conversation literally any other time!?" Dipper exclaimed. "We need to focus on finding Mabel!"

"Right," Ford agreed sheepishly. "I've done extensive scans on her molecular structure, I suppose I could create something to detect her specific enzyme count, but it'll take time."

"I got somethin' even better!" Stan pushed a button on his wrist. Ford bit his tongue, saving



any complaints of Stan adding yet another unauthorized device to his prosthetic arm for later.  
"It tracks down distress signals!"

"Mabel didn't have a distress signal with her." Dipper pointed out.

"Nah, but some schmuck broken down on the side of the road probably does," Stan said. "I used this baby to find easy targets to steal from, but Ford'll probably be able to fix whatever's wrong with their cruiser, and hopefully they'll be grateful enough to give us a ride." The device in his wrist beeped, and a small red blip appeared on his screen. "Nearest signal's just on the other side of this interdimensional cloud. Shouldn't take us more'n a few minutes to float there. Come on!"

---

Mabel's search for help wasn't going very smoothly. Most every Mabel she'd asked so far had just brushed her off, too busy with their own hobbies to try something as impossible as rebuilding/finishing a way out of this place. Her fruitless search brought her to Mechanic Mabel.

"I don't care about cost of labor and parts!" She steamed. "We're stranded in a pocket dimension, money is useless!"

"Are you tryin' to tell me how to do my job?" Mechanic Mabel said with narrowed eyes.

"N-no, it's just—"

"I'll level with ya, RP Mabel. You're right, we're stranded in a pocket dimension with no money. And no parts. No new parts means nothing's gettin' fixed."

"Can't you jury-rig something? There are tons of arts and crafts supplies here!"

"It kinda sounds like you're tryin' to tell me how to do my job again."

"Ugh!" RP Mabel stormed away, absolutely sick of arguing with every Mabel.

"Hey, wait!" A voice behind her called, and a hand grabbed her by the shoulder.

RP Mabel whipped around, to see a familiar blue hat, orange T-shirt, and navy vest.

"Dipper!?" She automatically gasped, but she realized her mistake immediately. Despite the similar clothes, this person was a girl with long brown hair. It was another Mabel.

"Uh, yes and no. Technically no. But don't feel bad, I get that a lot here. They call me Mabipper."

"Huh. Are you like a combo of Mabel and Dipper?"

"No, in my universe, I'm the one with a big dipper birthmark, and my brother Mason is the one who likes sweaters and matchmaking. But apparently just going by Dipper around here is confusing for everyone, so they just call me Mabipper. But we're getting off topic. Anyway, I heard you're trying to get out of here?"

"Yeah, but so far nobody else really seems interested in helping me," RP Mabel replied glumly.

"I know right?" Mabipper agreed. "I just barely missed the last ride out of here, and I've been looking for help ever since!"

"Wait, so you want to go home too?" RP Mabel asked.

"Well everyone here wants to go home." Mabipper corrected. "But it seems like we're the only ones here willing to put in the work to do it!"

"Two is all we need!" RP Mabel said confidently. "What have you done so far?"

"I've been trying to work on the busted space rig," Mabipper said. "But I'm not a genius or anything. I'm just good at school and stuff like that."

"I mean, I helped my Grunkle Ford rebuild his portal to bring his brother home this summer, so I probably know enough to help rebuild a spaceship, right?" RP Mabel reasoned.

"...We're never getting out of here." Mabipper sighed under her breath.

---

The source of the distress signal was a craft that reminded Dipper of a small RV. The pilot was a skinny three-eyed alien wearing what looked like a long purple scarf that wrapped around his entire body.

"Oh. My. Grop." The alien stammered through his universal translator. "I can't believe I'm getting held up by the most notorious outlaw in the Dvat Quadrant! When I blog about this, my views will go through the roof!" He pulled out some sort of camera and quickly began snapping pictures.

"Why am I not surprised." Ford gave Stan a knowing look.

"Hey, I might just be able to turn this to our advantage. Watch and learn." Stan grinned back. "That's right, it's me! Stan Pines! Intergalactic thief extraordinaire, scourge of Lottocron 9, and the late Bill Cipher's Most Wanted! I'm out here searchin' for the greatest grandniece in the multiverse." He pulled out a photo of Mabel. "You seen anyone like this?"

"I mean, I've heard rumors about a pocket dimension full of cute little girls like that one." The alien admitted. "But I don't know where it is, and even if I did, it's not like I could take you there — my craft has a busted thruster."

"You're in luck, bucko, my brother here is a genius." Stan put his good arm around Ford's shoulder. "He should have you up and runnin' in no time."

"I have never in my life seen such a craft, much less fixed one, but how hard can it be?" Ford chuckled uncertainly.

"Mmmm, I dunno if I want you guys working on my craft." The alien hesitated. "I mean, you're an outlaw..."

"Hey, I may be an outlaw, but that doesn't make me a bad guy!" Stan protested. "I'm out here with my brother and my grandnephew lookin' for my lost grandniece. I'm a family man!"

"Hard to argue with that logic!" The alien relented and popped the hood of his smoking thruster.

"What are the odds you can actually fix this thing?" Stan whispered to Ford as they both took a look at the mechanics.

Ford's eyes widened as he took in the broken thruster. It was surprisingly similar to an Earth jet engine.



"Not exactly my area of expertise, but I believe this blown fuel line is the problem. I'd estimate my chance of success is about 89%."

"That's a relief."

---

It was clear after an hour or so of tinkering that RP Mabel did not know enough to help rebuild a spaceship.

"Ugh!" RP Mabel groaned, "This seemed so much easier when Grunkle Ford was explaining what to do... wait, explain! That's it!"

"What's it?" Mabipper asked

"Explainbel! She can explain to us how to fix this thing!"

"...I'm not sure that's how that works."

"But it's at least worth a shot, right?" RP Mabel reasoned.

Mabipper nodded. She was willing to try anything.

They found Explainbel reading a book.

"Explainbel!" RP Mabel grabbed her scholarly counterpart by the shoulders. "We need your help rebuilding the space rig!"

"I'm sorry girls, but I'm really more of an explainer than a doer," Explainbel said sadly, insecurity suddenly visible in her eyes.

"Well then you explain it to us, and we'll do it!" RP Mabel insisted.

"I'm not sure that'll work," Explainbel protested weakly.

"Explainbel, don't you want to go home to your family?" Mabipper asked.

"Well, yes, but..." Explainbel's normally cheery face twisted into a frown. "It's complicated. A lot

of things were changing when I left my home dimension. Bad things! At least here in Dimension MAB-3L, I know I'll always be accepted. I know everyone is having a good time."

"But everyone here wants to go home," Mabipper argued. "Nobody's going to be completely happy staying here."

"I know the future is scary." RP Mabel placed a comforting hand on Explainbel's shoulder. "And I know you have a good thing going here. But you can't keep clinging to good things that can't last. Yeah, it's possible that the future will be really horrible. But it's also possible that the future will be great! You need to embrace the possibilities of the future and be responsible!"

Explainbel's only response was to pull RP Mabel and Mabipper into a hug.

"Oof! Okay, we're doing this now. We're all hugging," Mabipper said awkwardly.

Explainbel straightened her glasses and stood tall. "Okay Mabels, let's get to work!"

---

Ford closed the maintenance hatch on the interdimensional spacecraft. "Alright, try giving it some fuel now."

The stranded alien pushed the thruster button, and it whined to life. "Hey, great, it works!"

"Now, howzabout helpin' us find that little girl dimension?" Stan asked.

"Yyyeah, no," The alien said flatly. "I'm already super late to StarStarStarStarCon, and I'm not giving a ride to a notorious criminal. I would get so many call-out posts."

"Not even if we handcuffed him and threw him in the back?" Ford asked.

"As hilarious as that would be, no." The alien started up his craft. "Byeeee!"

"Welp, I tried doin' things the nice way." Stan sighed. He pointed his prosthetic arm at the alien and started charging the blaster built into his palm. "Outta the car, three eyes!"

"B-but you said you were a family man!"

"If it makes you feel any better," Stan said with a grin, "I need this for my family!"

The Pines boys piled into the space RV, Stan taking the wheel.

"What was with that handcuff comment, Poindexter?"

"I was just trying to get him to cooperate! Besides, we both know you can break out of handcuffs as easily as opening a door."

"Well yeah, but—"

"Guys! We need to focus on finding Mabel!" Dipper reprimanded them.

"Sorry," The elder twins apologized.

---

RP Mabel closed the maintenance hatch on the interdimensional spacecraft. "Alright, let's see if this bird can fly!"

The three Mabels piled into the spacecraft and started the takeoff sequence. The thrusters whined to life and the center of the triangular structure on the back began to glow blue. It slowly rose into the air... before promptly losing power and crashing back down again.

"Oh come on!" Mabipper cried indignantly.

Explainbel signed and curled up into Sweater Town. "I'm sorry girls. We don't have the parts to fix this thing, and I'm just not smart enough to figure out a way to replace them."

"But we're so close!" RP Mabel protested. "We can't give up now! There has to be something in here we can use for parts!" She looked around at all the junk strewn about the cargo bay. Her eyes were drawn to a boxy device shaped like a hand-held video game. "Like maybe this! What's this do?"

Explainbel poked her head out of her sweater. "It's a distress beacon."

"This is perfect!" RP Mabel grinned. "I know my Grunkles must still be looking for me, I haven't even been gone half a day yet!"



"But it's really dangerous! That thing's just as likely to summon an unimaginable beast that feeds on fear!" Explainbel explained.

"I like those odds!" RP Mabel declared, pushing the start button.

---

The Pines boys had been zipping about the space between dimensions for a while now, looking for any sign of the rumored pocket dimension where they hoped to find Mabel. Dipper noticed a blinking red light on the wrist of Stan's prosthetic arm as they passed a swirling pink nebula.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Huh, looks like it picked up a new distress signal." Stan shrugged. "Not too far from here."

"We should go check it out!" Dipper insisted. "What if it's Mabel?"

"Look kid, I get you're worried about your sister, but in case my own recent theft didn't make it clear, distress signals out here tend to attract unsavory types. Outlaws, con artists, gangs..."

"Giant eldritch horrors?" Ford supplied.

"Yeah, how'd you know that?"

Ford pointed wordlessly out the window to a writhing mass of black clouds, crackling with red energy, and two enormous, dark-blue arms poking out of it. They were reaching towards a small dimensional rift, which opened up into a pocket dimension filled with tall spires of pink crystal and populated almost entirely with familiar-looking curly-haired brunette girls.

"Oh no, Mabel!" Dipper cried.

---

The Mabels of MAB-3L were running around in a panic. A giant, terrifying monster was bearing down on their dimension, and most of their greatest fighters like Military Expert Mabel, Mabelsaurus Rex, and Horribly Inaccurate Pterosaur Mabel had all left back when the Space Rig was still working.

"Oh no, this is all my fault!" RP Mabel lamented.

"We can take this thing!" Mabipper said confidently.

"How?" Explainbel asked.

"By being smarter than it!" Mabipper grinned, holding up her grappling hook.

"What do you have in mind?" RP Mabel asked.

---

"Move over!" Ford insisted, grabbing the wheel from his brother.

"What do you have in mind?" Stan asked.

"I may have fixed it enough to run, but this craft still has a broken fuel line in the port thruster. If we set it to crash into that monster while flooding the jet engines, it should explode on impact."

Dipper gulped. "Won't we blow up too?"

"Not if we jump out first!" Stan assured him. "C'mon, help me rig the steering."

Using some kitchen supplies from the back of the space RV, they set the craft to collide with the oncoming monster.

"Alright, time to bail!" Stan opened the emergency exit hatch. Dipper clung tightly to his waist and Ford wrapped an arm around his shoulder.

As they plummeted towards the pocket dimension below, the monster took notice of them. A gaunt arm the length of a bus reached towards them. The three of them screamed. But just as the hand was about to grab them, a hundred grappling hooks shot out from the ground, slamming into the monster and pushing its enormous hand away. The monster screeched with rage, turning its attention back to the congregation of Mabels. While it was distracted, the stolen space RV slammed into its side with a fiery explosion!

"Yes!" Dipper exclaimed triumphantly. Then he noticed they were still falling at an alarming rate. "Aaaugh!"

The Mabels on the ground scrambled, pulling off sweaters, headbands, bandanas, and jackets, quickly weaving them together with balls of yarn until they had created a giant net. The falling Pines boys had a soft, bouncy landing.

Stan whistled. "Whoa, that's gotta be some kinda record."

"How are we going to find our own Mabel among all these look-alikes?" Ford worried as they clambered out of the net.

"Guys, come on, you really think I can't recognize my own twin sister?" Dipper said confidently. He pointed to a particularly frazzled looking Mabel trying to make her way through to the crowd towards them.

"Dipper!" She yelled excitedly, glomping onto him as she reached them. "I knew you guys would find me eventually!" She hugged her Grunkles too.

Another Mabel wearing a familiar blue hat and vest joined them. "So this is your brother? Yeah, I can definitely see the resemblance."

"It's a good thing you guys showed up when you did!" Mabipper said. "My plan was to tie that thing up with our grappling hooks, but I think blowing it up worked much better."

"Whoa, who are you?" Dipper asked.

"They call me Mabipper." She brushed away her bangs to reveal a big-dipper-shaped birthmark. Dipper pulled off his hat to reveal his own. The two of them laughed and shook hands.

"I guess this means you get to go home," Explainbel said with a sad smile.

"I wish I could help the rest of you go home." Dipper's sister sighed.

Stan's expression hardened. "Wait, you mean all these kids are stuck out here?"

All the Mabels around him nodded.

Stan's heart sank. He'd spent thirty years trapped between dimensions, hopping from place to place, trying to stay out of trouble. This place seemed safer than most of the dimensions Stan

had visited, but they were all still separated from their homes and families. That was something Stan wouldn't wish on anyone, especially not an alternate-universe version of his spunky grand-niece.

"We can't just leave 'em all here." He turned to his brother.

"Well we can't bring them back with us!" Ford protested.

"Couldn't you build 'em a portal or somethin'?"

"That would take almost a year! The kids are supposed to be on the bus back to California in three days."

"Well, I do have an unfinished escape pod." Brainbel admitted.

"And there is a busted space rig we were using," Mechanic Mabel confessed. "But we don't have the parts to fix it!"

"Wait, if you guys have an escape pod and a space rig that need parts, why don't you just combine them?" Dipper asked.

Brainbel and Mechanic Mabel looked blankly at each other.

"I was distracted," Brainbel said.

"She's really unapproachable," Mechanic Mabel said.

"I can't believe I never thought of that!" Mabipper facepalmed.

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It was late at night when they finally finished the new escape vehicle. RP Mabel was exhausted from all the work they'd done. But now, it was finished, and everyone was going home. All the Mabels had finally banded together to get things done. Dipper, Stan, and Ford being there to help direct the work made a big difference. Sometimes you just needed a few people with a different perspective to get things going.

"Thanks for your help, guys!" RP Mabel hugged Mabipper and Explainbel. "Even though our



plan didn't work the way we hoped it would, it ended up leading my family here."

"Thanks for helping us finally get home!" Mabipper smiled.

"Thanks for believing in me." Explainbel nodded.

"You ready, pumpkin?" Stan asked. RP Mabel nodded. He clipped a carabiner to the back of her sweater, and pushed a button in the elbow of his prosthetic arm. The infinity rope started to reel itself back in, and with a sudden yank, the Pines family went flying back towards their own dimension.

# FRESH PINES



# Starshine

By Mab

Ford fell through the portal screaming. Passing through was like falling into ice water, cold and airless as colors formed around him, multiplying further and further and Cipher is laughing in the back of his head and he's coming Cipher is coming is coming with one eye opening and the space coagulating to form fleshy bricks of triangles with sharp teeth—

And then Ford was devoured whole by something else completely.

He didn't see the creature that ate him. All he saw was a whalebone skeleton he passed through made of blinking red lights, and then he dropped into translucent goo. His skin tingled, he struggled to keep his head above the goo, and then the world uprighted itself again.

The creature that ate him had transparent, jelly-like flesh. He screamed, clawing at the stomach, but the interior of the beast's gut wouldn't give under his hands. Through its skin he could see the purple-black sand of the ground, the rounded structures placed on spindles of metal, the wide sky of red and purple stars. There was no more time to think as the beast dragged them both up a winding crystal stairway to a florescent pink building.

The beast groaned as it crossed the threshold into the building.

And it threw Ford up onto the floor.

Ford gasped for air as he hit wood covered in fluorescent paint. He scrambled to his knees, but the goo on him hardened, hardened, until he was stuck with his hands and knees on the floor.

"Get back! Get back! I'm warning you!" Ford said, swinging his head around like a feral dog, like maybe if he yells enough the beast will go away, but—no. No, the beast isn't alone. In a bar painted like a glittery rainbow nightmare, he is surrounded by creatures with impossible anatomy, twisting all around him, nothing but bulbous eyes and claws and mouths and—

"Gigi, we talked about this."

...And one of them spoke English.

The monsters didn't lunge for him. Instead, they started shifting, clearing a way for the speaker.

"You can't keep throwing up in my bar. Just give recruits the orientation packets!"

It's a female. The translucent beast sitting behind Ford chirruped.

"What? There's no such thing as 'too much glitter for orientation.'"

A human woman walked through the crowd and stood before him. She stood tall with silver-streaked short-cropped hair, and her skin—what was visible past her leather jacket and pants—rippled with shimmering, animated tattoos. The tattoos curled along the side of her face, shaping the silhouette into half a heart.

When she crouched down to his level, her eyes were soft, and her lips stretched in a smile that showed crooked teeth.

"Hi, Ford," she said gently. "I've been waiting for you."

Ford's mouth hung open, his eyes narrowing to examine her face before saying, "I have no idea who you are."

She threw her head back and laughed a bright bellow of a laugh that made her tattoos shimmer. "'Course you don't, silly! You're what, thirty? Your me hasn't been born yet."

She clapped him on the shoulder like they were old friends before Ford could even comprehend what the hell she just said. "Now let me get a chisel or you're sitting there all night."

Activity in the bar started up again, strange creatures moving around his frozen form to jostle for drinks, which now an alien with red fur and four large black eyes was pouring. Every drink glimmered with its own light, iridescent wisps flying from the cups like fairies. The human woman returned with a chisel, whistling a cheerful tune as she chipped away at the hardened goo with an expert hand.

"Gigi says that Cipher was about to eat you," the woman said. On her hands, tattoos of strange spider-like creatures with needle-like appendages tapped over her knuckles. "You're lucky she saved you first."

"Yes, I feel very safe right now," Ford said with acid. The woman hummed in response, still happily chipping away. "What do you know about Cipher?"



"He's an evil triangle who likes to make deals and possess people?"

Ford opened his mouth to correct her, then closed it when he couldn't think of a thing to correct.

"Yeah, the whole reason we're all here is because we want to take him down." The woman chipped away the goo holding Ford's hands in place. He jerked them back close to his chest, rubbing them to reassure himself they still worked.

"*You* are taking him down?" Ford said, arching an eyebrow as he took in the sparkly bar full of ne'er-do-well aliens and a woman who looked like she bathed in glue and dove into a pile of Lisa Frank paintings.

"Yep!"

Ford couldn't tell if the woman was ignoring his skepticism or was just oblivious to it. Honestly, he hadn't even spoken to a woman besides Mom for this long since awkwardly chatting with Fiddleford's bride at their wedding reception. Maybe women were just like this.

The woman chipped off the last of the goo holding him to the ground before offering her arm. "I bet you're starving. Come with me to the back and I'll tell you everything."

Ford considered running for the door—this woman's associate had just kidnapped him, after all—but it'd bother him forever if he never learned how she knew his name. He brushed away her arm, but he stood up anyway with a nod. Still somehow not reacting to his deliberately unfriendliness, she hummed as she led him through the crowd, weaving between aliens of impossible biology and proportions behind the bar and into a back room.

Ford's eyes had to adjust all over again to the new space. Gone were the garish colors and sparkles. It was just a modest studio area with a messy bed, a table for two, and a kitchenette. By the bed with a blanket covered in pine tree print was a photograph. It was a familiar old man hugging a smiling little girl close.

The old man looked too much like Ford's father for comfort.

"What's that?" Ford asked, pointing at the picture and resisting the urge to sit down and collapse from exhaustion.

"That's you from another universe. Ford Prime? OG Ford? Ford the First? Shout if you hear one you like; I'm just spitballing," the woman said, pouring a glass of weirdly normal-looking water and offering it to him. Ford frowned at the cup, then at her. After a moment, the woman rolled her eyes to the ceiling before taking a gulp of the water, making a point of swallowing before offering it to Ford again. Ford's shoulders relaxed as he accepted it.

"Who are you?" he asked, his eyes lingering on the little girl in the picture. A little girl with no tattoos, a girl with crooked teeth and bright eyes.

"My name's Mabel. Mabel Pines."

Mabel moved to the kitchenette, working some magic in there that was probably just instinctual for women. She was mixing powders and liquids together (and, to Ford's mild embarrassment, he hadn't eaten anything but TV dinners for three years so he could hardly tell what she was doing) and something or other was coming together.

"I'm another universe's version of your grand niece."

Ford blinked at her before grimacing. "Stanley has a child?"

"Wrong brother. I'm Shermy's grandchild."

"Shermy?" Ford turned the glass in his hand, slowly sitting down. "...Alright. Why is an alternate version of Shermy's future grandchild running a bar in the multiverse?"

"Long story." Whatever Mabel was doing in that kitchenette, it smelled good. She was pouring liquid batter into a frying pan, and the smell of... was that chocolate in the air? "Stan just pushed you into the portal, right?"

Ford pursed his lips, staying quiet.

"Well, Stan basically spends the next thirty years trying to rebuild the portal—"

"He what?"

"—and then me and my brother Dipper come stay with him for a summer, Dipper finds your journals, Stan opens the portal, Dipper panics and pushes me in when he's trying to turn it off,

and then I'm trapped in the multiverse with you." Mabel picked up a spatula, waving it for emphasis. "We have this whole family cycle thing going where twins strand each other in the cosmos. You could probably make a TV show out of it!"

Ford shifted uncomfortably, finally allowing himself to sit down at the table. Exhaustion nipped at his heels. He hadn't slept in so long, fearing Cipher. Not even the strange and wild story Mabel told him really sank in—the thought of his teenaged brother having a child, much less a grandchild, made him wrinkle his nose. But there was one important thing she was saying, and that was that an alternate Ford was out there, one that was older and wiser and knew his struggles with Cipher. Who else could help him destroy the demon for good but himself?

"Where's your Ford?"

"Dead."

Ford's heart sank. Mabel flipped something onto a plate before taking it to the table. It looked like... chocolate chip pancakes. No sparkles or otherworldly shapes or iridescent colors or anything.

"How?" he asked.

"Infection, I think." For the first time, Mabel's smile didn't reach her eyes. She sat at the table across from Ford. Stars twinkled in the shape of a six-fingered hand by her ear. "An animal bit him when we were in a universe without any doctors. He got gangrene. I chopped off his leg for him, but it got into his heart anyway. I probably should have cut higher."

Ford's stomach turned. He didn't touch the pancakes, and it wasn't because he was suspicious of poison.

"I..." His eyes darted to the picture she kept by her bed. A picture of a man she watched die. "... How old were you? When that happened?"

"Not sure. Maybe sixteen?"

"I'm sorry," he said because he didn't know if there was anything else to say.

"He probably would have lived to his nineties if he weren't stuck out here," Mabel continued.

The light in her eyes was dim, even as she smiled at him. "It's not a great place to be growing old, much less with a kid to take care of."

Ford shifted again in his seat. His stomach ached, but he couldn't handle the thought of eating. "What about Cipher?" he said. "He must be destroyed."

"You're speaking my language." The tattoos on her neck shimmered. Above her carotid gleamed a golden triangle. "I've got a whole network of rebel aliens. We can team up, get you up to speed, pick your big brain for weapon designs, kill the triangle, and badabing badaboom, you vacation until Stan brings you home. How does that sound?"

She said it like it'd be so easy. Like Cipher didn't have a way of wriggling into minds, like he couldn't see through every eye and slip in when Ford was asleep. Like he wasn't a monster from every person's nightmare.

Like Ford wasn't the one who awakened him.

Ford's eyes darted again to the photograph by Mabel's bed. An old man hugging a little girl. Ford wasn't a hugger. His double must have loved the girl a lot to squeeze her so close, to smile so wide for a picture. He loved her, and then he died and left her all alone.

The old man's eyes were heavy on him, pressing on his chest harder than Cipher's ever did. *How dare you let her clean up your messes?*

"No," Ford said.

"What?" Mabel's eyebrows flew up.

"No." Ford pushed his chair back, stumbling from the weight of the old man's eyes. "I summoned Cipher. It's my responsibility to put him down. Thank you for the hospitality, but I must be on my way."

"Are you kidding?" Mabel stood from the table. Lightning flickered at her temple. "You just showed up trapped in the multiverse and you think you can just, what, take Cipher down on your own with sheer stubbornness?"

"Yes, I do," Ford said, already turning away from the table and walking away. He needed food



and sleep, but he wouldn't take it from her, not with that picture staring at him.

"Hey, wait—"

Ford walked back out into the bar. It was packed with aliens, but he kept his eyes on the door and moved between the patrons with confidence. Maybe if he acted confident enough, no one would stop him.

Slamming open the door hit him with a wave of fresh air that smelled of the ocean, even if he didn't see the ocean anywhere. His shoes sank into the purple sand before Mabel caught up, grabbing him by the elbow. Ford squawked when she did, then pretended he didn't.

"Don't be such a pighead!" Even in the dark of the outdoors, Mabel's tattoos shimmered. "At least read his journals if you want to be the big dumb hero who doesn't need any help."

The idea of reading another genius' work would usually be tantalizing. It could be helpful, even.

But he thought of the picture. He thought of what it might be like to read his own handwriting talking about a child and his own slow death. He thought of what it'd be like to read about the terror of looming mortality and the knowledge he was leaving a child alone to die.

"No." He pulled his arm from her. It was too dark to see her eyes. He was thankful. "I'm sorry about your great uncle, but I don't need any help. I'll figure this out on my own."

If she was right, he had thirty years.

He walked away. To some surprise, she let him. But he could feel her eyes on the back of his neck for years after.

---

Thirty years to figure things out. Twenty years. Fifteen years. Ten years. Five years. Ford tried to forget about the strange tattooed woman, but it was hard when so many aliens remembered seeing a man looking just like him with a little girl, and was that him? How was the girl? And every rainbow or streak of glitter murmured in the back of his head about her grim prophecy. A failed attempt by his brother to save him, leading to a child thrust in his arms that he will fail and die for.

It was even harder to forget her when one day a monster tore his stomach open and knocked him out, and then he woke up on Mabel's bed.

Her hair gleamed silver now. Her room smelled like blood and antiseptic. She was throwing out his dirty bandages when he opened his eyes and groaned.

"Morning sleepyhead!" she chirped like they had seen each other yesterday.

"Damn it," Ford responded, squeezing his eyes shut.

"Thank you for saving my life, Mabel, even though I'm a stubborn jerk," she said cheerfully.

"You're welcome, Ford!"

"Tell me you haven't been watching me since I left," Ford mumbled, daring to rest a hand on his stomach. Neat stitches held it together perfectly, an ointment smeared across the seam that made his skin tingle, but the surface was tender and his whole body ached.

"Alright. I haven't been watching you since you left."

Ford closed his eyes. The light was too harsh. "Why?"

"Why did I save you?" Mabel sat down next to the bed. "We're family, silly."

"You really think we are?"

She didn't hesitate. "Yeah. I do."

Ford didn't have a snappy answer for how they can't technically be family because they were from different worlds. He fell back asleep instead.

Ford woke up again when it was dark. The stitches were gone, his stomach fused together again. He sat up in bed to see Mabel sleeping on a chair. Her tattoos shimmered with fantastical images as she slept.

He turned his head. The Picture was still by the bed. The face of the old man didn't look so strange anymore. It was the same face he looked at in the mirror.

A familiar book was there too. A journal with a six-fingered hand on the cover.

He had five years to figure things out. Five years until Stan would mess up and send him a child who'd grow to be an old woman all alone.

Ford cursed under his breath, pawing to turn on the bedside lamp before cracking the book open.

The smell of paper was familiar. So was the handwriting, and every stroke of a pen when drawing a picture. Ford grimaced as he skimmed the pages, searching for something to give him the secret to destroy Bill Cipher.

But every other page was a sketch of a child growing into a young woman. Mabel holding a crab with eight tails. Mabel chasing bubbles. Mabel showing off a tattoo of a pine tree on her arm. Barely a mention of Cipher at all.

Then the entries stopped. The last one began with *Dear Mabel*. Ford's eyes dragged across the message against his will.

*Dear Mabel,*

*I have a feeling this is the end for me. Even if I heal, I can't continue adventuring across the multiverse with only one leg. I would slow you down.*

*I want you to know that I am not afraid of dying. I have led a life full of adventure and discovery. It was everything I dreamed of. I wish I could have destroyed Cipher before I died, but that will be someone else's work. I also wish I reconciled with my brother, but we will just have to meet again in the next world.*

*My greatest regret is leaving you alone. It's a lonely life out here in the multiverse, and you deserve to have someone at your side as you uncover adventures all your own. I'm sorry I can't stay.*

*I want you to know that I am not afraid for you. You are a tenacious, bold, brilliant girl growing into a wonderful young woman. I don't think I have taught you nearly as much as you have taught me, and I have faith that you'll be okay with or without my help. You have all the tools to survive that you need. Most of all, you have what I learned too late: understanding that you*

*do not have to do everything on your own.*

*You were always my greatest adventure, Mabel. I love you.*

*Love,*

*Ford*

His eyes lingered on the words.

You do not have to do everything on your own.

Ford looked at The Picture again. The old man's eyes seemed much less heavy now.

"Midnight reading?"

Ford started, almost dropping the book. Mabel turned her head to look at him, rubbing sleep from her eyes. "Read anything interesting?"

Ford pressed his lips together, drumming his fingers on the book cover. He didn't know how to talk about what he'd read. He didn't have the words for what he felt.

"...I don't want to write a letter like that in another ten years."

It wasn't nearly enough to express himself. But Mabel blinked at him, leaning back in her chair and working on a kink in her neck.

"I don't want you to be writing a letter like that either," she said. "I want to go kill Cipher together and you go home to get old and gray with Stan and see your version of me and my brother grow up."

Ford's eyes lingered on her face. He wondered how it would feel to be an old man watching children grow up with his brother by his side.

You do not have to do everything on your own.

"Well." Ford cleared his throat, placing the book beside the picture of the old man and little girl.



"I suppose it'd be easier to make sure that happens if we work together."

"Yeah?" A smile spread across her face. She looked thirty years younger. "You wanna team up?"

Ford huffed in response, sliding out of bed as he prodded his stomach, still somehow whole. "Well, you saved my life," he grunted before waving at the bed. "Go sleep in your actual bed. You're too old to sleep in chairs."

"Are you kidding? I'm going to be young forever."

"Tell that to your neck." Ford waved her toward the bed as he squinted at the kitchenette. "I'll make breakfast. Least I can do."

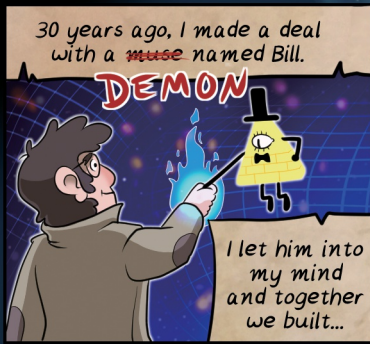
"Don't set the kitchen on fire," she said, practically singing as she massaged her neck and crawled into bed.

Ford hummed, searching the ingredients in her cabinet. What once had seemed strange and foreign now felt a little more familiar. Flour. Sugar. Chocolate chips.

Behind him, he could hear her soft snores as she fell asleep; and without the need to look he could tell there was a smile on her face.

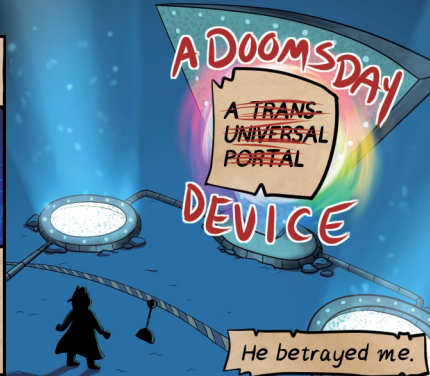
30 years ago, I made a deal with a ~~mouse~~ named Bill.

**DEMON**



I let him into my mind and together we built...

**A DOOMSDAY**  
**A TRANS-UNIVERSAL PORTAL**  
**DEVICE**



He betrayed me.

He possessed me whenever I slept.



I needed help and contacted the one person I could trust.

My twin, Stanley, answered but, when he arrived, we had a violent fight.

**AAAAH!**



**CAUTION! EXTREMELY HOT!**

We didn't realize that we recklessly



Activated the portal.



**STANLEY! DO SOMETHING!**



It drew me in

**OH NO! WHAT DO I DO?**

But Stanley had an idea.



?



!

**YOU JERK.**

**GRAB!!!**



**I'M NOT**



**GOING TO**

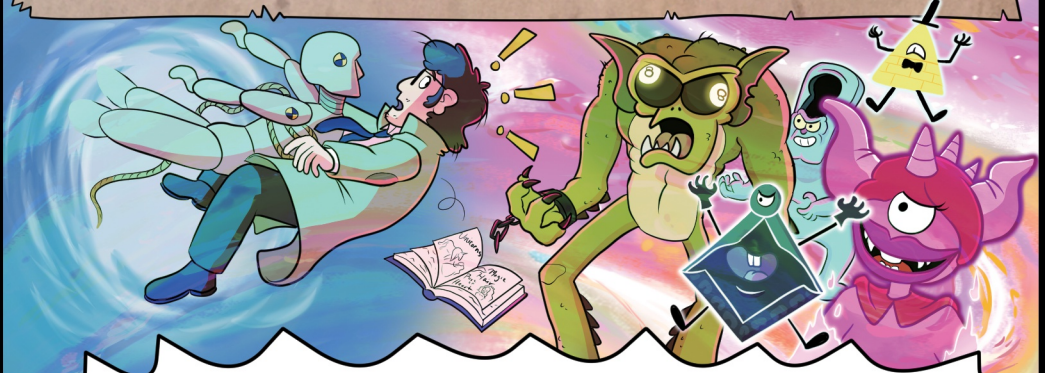


**LOSE YOU AGAIN!**

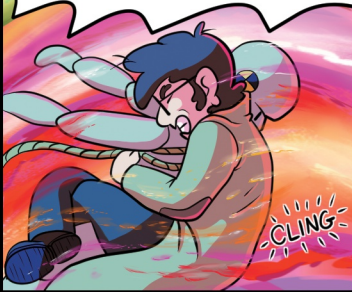




He threw me a lifeline to stop the portal from pulling me into Bill's



## NIGHTMARE REALM



And...





Could still possess me to do unspeakable things to the world and myself. To minimize Bill's mayhem, Stanley and I repurposed the portal's underground lab as a containment unit.



# THE MAN DOWNSTAIRS



# Stories Bring Us Home

By The sometimeswarrior

Everything is Bill's bright yellow cackles—more than around him, but inside him, grabbing at his every insecurity like only Bill—the only entity Ford has ever let in—could. It's not the Nightmare Realm. It's something else, something more intimate and terrifying, as though the Nightmare Realm is somehow within him now, and entirely made up of his own personal nightmares. Crampelter's smirks combine with his own six-fingered reflections, combine with choruses of *Freak, Freak, Freak*, and the disdain in Fiddleford's eyes, and Bill's taunts of macabre delight. *You really thought you could beat me, Sixer? You really thought you were that special?!*

"Gah." Ford squints, raises his hands to his temples to try to block it out, like the metal plate that—he sees now—he should have let the Oracle implant there. Perhaps that might have spared him this torment.

*But you didn't, you Freak!* Bill snarls from all around him, within him. *No, little Fords-y thought he could be the savior of the Universe all by himself! No help from anyone! Not even the frikin' Oracle! A cackle. Gimme a break! Not like you could've ever beaten me anyway, but on your own?! Ha!*

It's a moment of stabbing regret, a knife of his own stupidity digging deep into his gut, and even if it doesn't come as a surprise, it nonetheless knocks his guard away just long enough for him to lower his hands—all the good they did him anyway, with Bill already inside his head. (He's pretty *sure* he's inside his head at this point, that this is all some sort of elaborate fabrication of his mind. He doesn't have the faintest idea where in the multiverse he *actually* is...) And then the torments return in spades—though they hadn't really left. Crampelter and his father and Fiddleford and Bill, Bill, Bill, *Freak, Freak, Freak...*

"Hi Grunkle Ford!" a voice rings out, cuts across all the rest of the noise, and it's different than everything else around him, than the nightmares. "I'm Mabel! And I'm gonna tell you a story! Actually, it's funny, I once made a whole puppet-show rock opera out of this, and it'll be fun to see how it is to just *tell* it without the music, or the puppets..."

It's a rope, this voice, what it's saying. Something other than Bill and his games to cling to. So Ford grasps it, and holds tight.

It's Mabel that first broaches the topic, and she picks her moment well. Stan stumbles up from the basement, bleary-eyed, and when he wanders into the kitchen for the cup of coffee that he so desperately needs, Mabel is already there, sitting at the table, a glass of that godforsaken fluorescent substance in her hand, and a pot of coffee waiting for him in the percolator.

"Morning, Grunkle Stan! I made Mabel Juice, but I know you don't like it, so I made you some coffee too."

"How the heck do *you* know how to make coffee?"

"I wake up really early at home sometimes, so Mom taught me how. She said if I was gonna be up before everyone else anyway, I might as well make it for them!"

"Did she let you *drink* it?!"

"She never told me I *wasn't* allowed to drink it...but I tasted it once, and it's *horrible*. I don't get why you old people all like it so much!"

Stan grunts in a half-laugh. If he weren't so tired he might have a snarky response, but none comes to him, and he doesn't have the energy to force it. "Thanks, Pumpkin." He pours himself a cup and downs it. "What *are* you doing up so early? Or...*is* it early?" For all he knows, it's the middle of the day. He's hardly left the basement since the portal.

Mabel nods. "It's early. Dipper's up too. Soos is going to come take him into town to get more soup at Greasey's. We figured you—or, um, your, ya know, the guy in our basement—you both were starting to run out."

"Oh. Yeah. Good." And it *is* a good point. He hadn't even *thought* of that, but they *would* have run out of soup in the next day or two, and then he'd have been scrambling. He's so lucky the kids are here—he'd known that already, and the past few days have reiterated it. But this isn't the summer they signed up for. He should send them home, call their parents, explain the situation—though, how would that conversation go? *Uh, yeah, I'm not actually Stanford, I'm your Uncle Stanley who you thought died thirty years ago, but the real Stanford's back now, and comatose in my basement.*

But he can't think about that yet. "I should get back down there."

"Grunkle Stan, wait a minute—"

"I gotta go, Pumpkin. If he wakes up, I gotta be there."

"Then I'll go with you!" Mabel stands, leaving her half-finished glass of Mabel Juice on the table.

Stan stops in his tracks, sighs, then turns back toward her. "Kiddo, I don't know if it's—if *he's*—safe. And if I can't keep you safe, I don't want you to be around him."

"But we were there when he came out of the portal—"

"And you shouldn't have been! There's a reason I didn't tell you kids about what I was doing in the basement!"

"But we *were*. And we know what's going on now. Grunkle Stan, you've been all alone with all of this for a really long time. But we're *here* now! We can help!"

Stan looks at her. He's been a conman for most of his life, has manipulated enough people to know when he's being manipulated himself, even if Mabel's not doing it on purpose. She's found out his secret now—not only about Ford and the portal, but about how he's been carrying them like a hole all these years, how he's felt *small* in this house that's too big for one person with its weird drafty windows and echoing walls, that until this summer, he'd spend months—sometimes *years*—talking to his own reflection in the mirror whenever he could bring himself to look at it, just to fill the quiet.

She knows it. She's pulling him right by his guts, and he feels himself start to relent. "There's not much to do now that his injuries are fixed up, 'sides from pour soup down his throat and, ya know, clean him. I don't even talk to him really. I just kinda...keep him company."

"I can do that! I could read him a story!"

"Kid..."

"*Pleassseeeee*, Grunkle Stan!"

If he were responsible, someone these kids *deserve*, he'd say no. He'd be able to move past

that puppy-dog glint in her wide eyes and draw the boundary that ought to be drawn, keep his niece up here in the sun to have the summer she was supposed to have, rather than drag her down with him to that dingy basement where he has spent the better part of the past decades.

But she's a good salesman. Woman. Girl. Whatever. And he's so *tired*. And he's not a good uncle, he knows this, and he's never been *responsible*.

So, it's in a moment of weakness that he grunts, to Mabel's giddy delight, "Uck! *Fine!*" and leaves her to bounce happily behind him.

---

Ford is laid up where the portal used to stand, sprawled out unmoving on the couch that Soos dragged down as soon as it became evident that Stanley's brother was, in fact, still breathing.

The rest of the room is still the mess it's been for the past decades—worse, with the *pieces* of the portal scattered around instead of the thing itself, as well as all of the things that Stan has used over the past several days to tend to Ford's body: empty soup containers, washcloths all around the floor, and of course the single chair that he brought from the other part of the lab.

If Mabel notices the mess, she is unfazed and merely hones in on the man on top of the couch. Stan had braced himself for the sight to upset her, thought that he'd have to fumble to pick up whatever pieces of her were left paralyzed by the image of her uncle's twin brother pale and unresponsive. But his niece appears as happy as ever, gleefully bounds to the chair set up next to the couch, leaving him to lean against the wall, arms crossed, to watch.

"Hi, Grunkle Ford!" she says. "I'm Mable! And I'm gonna tell you a story! Actually, it's funny, I once made a whole puppet-show rock opera out of this, and it'll be fun to see how it is to just *tell* it without the music, or the puppets...What was I saying? Oh yeah! Once there was a girl named Mabel..."

She treads through the narrated version of the whole godforsaken puppet show, unperturbed by Ford's groans and his silence. And as she continues, Stan gradually feels his own clenched jaw relax.

It's nice, he thinks, to hear someone else talking down here, and despite himself, he clings to Mabel's unrelenting voice.



When Soos appears several hours later with soup, Stan orders him to bring down a second chair.

---

Stan shoos Mabel away whenever she starts to yawn, but she reappears every morning. And several days after they've settled into this routine when she appears, Dipper begins to trail behind her.

The first morning the kid joins her, Stan eyes him. They haven't had the best relationship this summer, and things are still especially tense between them after he'd witnessed his sister almost be pulled into the portal. But Dipper doesn't shrink away. Though he stands behind his sister, he holds his head up, chin angled toward Stan in something almost like defiance, as though he's expecting his uncle to object to his presence and banish him back upstairs.

"I...I'm going to talk to the Author!"

Stan raises an eyebrow and swallows a grin. "Knock yourself out, kid."

Dipper nods, then paces to Ford's couchside. "Great-Uncle Ford, my name is Dipper, and I've been studying your journals all summer. I had some thoughts and...and some *questions* I wanted to share with you, if that's alright..."

Then he dives in with the nerd-speak, speaking ever more rapidly, flipping pages and running his fingers down them, glancing back and forth between the journal and his great-uncle's comatose face.

Stan starts to tune out once he stops understanding words, but not before the thought creeps into his head that Ford would love this. *Is* loving this, if he can hear. And if that idea brings water to prick at his eyes...well, the steam from the coffee is already fogging up his glasses. No one will see.

---

Soos brings down a third chair.

---

One night, the kids don't return upstairs, even after they start yawning and Stan tries to hustle them back to their beds. They protest, ever sleepier, eyes ever droopier, until they each fall

asleep curled up in their respective chairs.

For a moment, Stan listens to them breathe. He used to be that carefree, with that same courage and the arrogance he needed to believe in his own future. And he was like that because of...

Stan shoots Ford's sleeping body a glance, then scooches his chair closer to it. He sighs, and when he speaks, his voice is raspy, quiet.

"Look, I know you and I weren't exactly pals last time we saw each other. And after all that, after everything I've done for the past thirty years to try and fix my big screw-up and get you back, it never even occurred to me that you might not *want* to come back from wherever you were in that weird-o place, not if it meant that you'd have to see me again when you got here. I shoulda thought-a that.

"And I get it. You're mad at me. Truth is, I'm mad at me too. I've been mad at me for just about as long as I can remember. But something that's also true is that when I got here, thirty years ago, it looked like you'd been alone for a long time. Too long."

Stan pinches the bridge of his nose between two fingers. What's left of the nerd equipment whirs in the other room.

"But you're not the only one who's had it rough, ya know. I've been alone for a long time too. We were together for—what? All of twenty minutes? Then you disappeared into that portal and left me by myself in this gigantic house of yours in the middle of nowhere in the woods. And yeah, not all these idiots out here are terrible—but mostly I've been down here, doing what I had to do to get you back! I've been alone too!

"But then..." Stan pauses. Behind him Mabel snores. Dipper mumbles something in his sleep that Stan can't quite make out. "These kids showed up. They're a couple of rascals. Get into all sorts of trouble, like we used to. And Dipper's like you with all his sci-fi crap, and Mabel practically farts glitter, but they're good kids. They're the first thing other than you and me and this portal that I've been able to care about in thirty years, and I've been busting my butt all summer to keep them safe.

"And I keep trying to get them to go back upstairs, to enjoy the time they have left here and do kid stuff before they have to go back to their normal lives. But all they've wanted to do

since you came back through that thing you built is sit here with you, and tell you weird stories, and read your own journals back to you. They're freakin' desperate to meet you, Ford."

Water pricks at Stan's eyes, and he grunts, balling his hands into fists. He slams them down on the couch next to Ford's form, and the vibrations jostle the body. "So you don't want to wake up for me, fine. But you better wake up for those kids, Poindexter! Because I've been working my butt off to stop anything from hurting them, and if after everything, after all that, my own brother ends up being the thing that hurts them...Forget it! It's not gonna happen! So just, if you're still *you* in there, just come on and wake up already!

"You won't have to be *alone* anymore, because even if you can't stand me, these kids are here, and..."

He pauses, raises his arm to wipe his eyes dry. And then the notion swims into his mind of its own volition. Like a taunt, like the promise of gold buried under all that New Jersey seashore sand.

"And maybe we could all just be a *family*."

---

"Gruk! Stan! Grunk! Stan, wake up!"

When Stan snaps awake in the chair, it's to see the kids standing over him and his brother jerking to life on the couch.

He swallows. Stands slowly. "Stanford?"

And then, it's like one of those freaky marionettes he keeps in a display case upstairs for the tourists, the way Ford sits up, like there's a string directing him, yanking him by the stomach, the neck. And the way he looks at Stan, the way he...is it a *smile*?

In retrospect, that should have been a compelling first clue. Ford wouldn't have smiled at him of his own volition.

"His eyes!" Dipper shouts. "They're... that's not Great-Uncle Ford!"

"Kid, what are you—"

"No look, his eyes, they're glowing! That's *Bill!*"

Stan squints. There are flashes in his own head, impressions of a mind compromised, something between dreaming and memory, and in them, there is a sentient triangle floating, its one eye squinting, cackling...

"Stanford?" he repeats, more tentatively.

"*Sorry, Fords-y's not here today!*" The body jerks to its feet, and makes a move toward them. Ford was never *graceful*, but he never moved like *this*, like something outside of him was yanking his body forward, shoving it like a ragdoll, like those schoolyard *bullies* used to, so long ago, in those moments before Stan could put himself between them...

"Kids. Upstairs."

Mabel pouts. "But—"

"Not asking! Attic! *Now!*"

"No, Grunkle Stan!" Dipper clenches his fist. "I finally get it: the answer to the questions I've been asking all summer, the mysteries at the center of this town... it all comes down to this family—*my* family! It always has. So don't tell us to leave! We're here, okay? We're *here*."

It's the first time the kid has put foot down all summer, and somewhere, beneath all the terror Stan feels—for his niece and nephew, and for his brother, that he will be as inadequate as he always has been to protect all of them—beneath all of that, a bubble of pride bursts in Stan's gut.

And it makes him hesitate for a split-second too long.

Ford's body lunges.

The demon cackles.

But it's apparently not as good as it thinks it is at piloting a person, because Ford trips on one of the kids' chairs, crashes into the floor before he could reach them, and this time Stan doesn't miss his moment. He jumps on his brother, pins Ford's arms to his sides. "Kids!"



He means it as another order, a desperate plea for them to save their own skins and return to the town above whatever weirdness is happening down here. But they take it as an indication to draw closer.

"Grunkle Ford," Mabel says. "Come on, you gotta come out of there! I wanna know what you thought of my story!"

"Y-yeah!" Dipper holds up the journal. "And we have so much to talk about!"

"*Ha!*" Ford's body wriggles in Stan's grasp. "*You kids sure are idiots if you think this is really going to work!*"

"Kids, get *out* of here!"

But they ignore both the demon and their uncle. Mabel lays a steady hand on top of Ford's twitching one. "We're not going anywhere, Grunkle Ford."

"*Don't make me laugh—*" But then the demon voice stops short. Ford's body seizes. "*Leave—No! —Them—Impossible!—Alone!*"

Ford slackens, and Stan suddenly feels like he is once again stuck in the trunk of Rico's car, all the air suddenly gone from around him. It *can't* be, not now, not after the past thirty years, and then these last several days...

But then Ford's eyes blink back open. They're glassy, but not glowing.

"Ford?" Stan's voice is a quiver in the air.

"Stanley."

It's the first time he's heard his name in quite that way in thirty years.

Bill is not gone. Ford will explain later—once he's sitting up and something like himself again—that the demon inhabits his mind now, and that that inherently presents a risk, and that they will need to take precautions. They will take those precautions, devise them together over the next several days, and then put them into effect shortly thereafter.

But that's all to come. In *this* moment, Mabel and Dipper approach, a small tentative smile on each of their faces, and for an instant, as all four of them huddle together, Stan feels something he hasn't felt in half a century, something he wouldn't trade for anything, not for the greatest adventure on the high seas, not for all the gold in New Jersey.

"Kids," Ford says.





Greetings from  
the











# Like Batman and Robin

By Amuk

This was weird. Standing in his socks in the middle of the attic he shared with his twin sister, that was Dipper's only thought. There was no other way to explain why he was dressing up in what could have been a Halloween costume, ready to go fight crime in the middle of the night.

Or, well, the late evening/early night, because despite being almost thirteen, Dipper couldn't stay up past eleven even if his life depended on it. Which was a problem when one's fighting crime—often his life did depend on it.

"This is really weird," he uttered aloud now, unable to shake off his unease. Dipper turned to Mabel. "You see how this is weird, right?"

"What do you mean, weird?" Mabel hummed some made-up song obliviously as she rifled through her drawers, tossing sweaters over her shoulder in her search.

"This?" Dipper gestured at his slightly baggy black clothes. Or 'uniform', as his Grunkle Ford put it. Admittedly, despite not fitting him quite right, the costume was really nice for being homemade. There were pockets everywhere, big enough to carry magnifying lenses and flashlights and everything else his paranoid brain thought of. "We're dressing up to go fight crime at night."

"Well of course it's at night." Mabel shot him a disparaging look over her shoulder. "No one does crime in the day."

"That's...not true. You know that's not true, right?" Dipper asked worriedly. It was hard, sometimes, to tell when Mabel earnestly believed in something and when she was just getting caught up in the romance of it all.

"Well, duh, but no one fights crime in the day." Mabel rolled her eyes, turning back to her sweater search. "Have you seen any hero do that?"

"Have you seen anyone fight at all?" Dipper asked incredulously. Before she could say anything, he clarified, "Besides us?"

She deflated slightly at that, plopping on the ground and scratching her chin as she thought about it. The moment her eyes lit it up, he could almost see the lightbulb going off above

her head. Confidently, Mabel lifted her finger and opened her mouth—

“Or our Grunkles,” he added, rolling his eyes when she groaned. She was so predictable sometimes. “Someone outside of our family.”

“Okay, fine. Maybe you can fight in the day,” she reluctantly agreed. “But it’s really uncool.”

“Good—that wasn’t my point!” One day, he was going to go bald because of his family. Dipper was certain of that. He just managed to resist the urge to tear out his hair. “Isn’t this really weird? We’re dressing up in costumes and fighting crime! It’s like we’re in a comic book.”

“Maybe we are,” Mabel cheerfully retorted, clapping her hands together excitedly. “You think I could marry Bruce Wayne and get his batcave?”

The image was too impossible for him to even imagine. Dipper wasn’t sure what scared him more—Mabel sitting in the batcave or the fact that he couldn’t shake off the feeling that she could date Batman if she tried. Even his Grunkles had a hard time saying no to her. Shaking his head clear of these thoughts, he crossed his arms and frowned. “Mabel, come on. Be serious.”

“I am,” she protested. Seeing the look on his face, she clambered to her feet and approached him. “Dipper, come on, this isn’t the weirdest thing that happened all summer. It’s not even in the top five. I mean, yeah, the Grunkles are kinda weird about everything, but that’s just who they are.”

Dipper bit his cheek. It was hard to disagree when they were spending the summer in a renovated villain’s lair, complete with enough villain props to compete with any comic book’s rogue gallery. Dipper couldn’t even be certain on which props were fake—he’d seen enough obscure villains to utterly believe there was one called the Jackalope. “But that’s an ordinary weird. Grunkle Stan scams people and Grunkle Ford doesn’t leave the basement. It’s weird, but not super weird. Not like being a superhero.”

“Oh, you worry too much.” Mabel sighed, picking up a trench coat off the floor. She draped it around her shoulders and pulled the collars up. “Don’t look at me, I’m totally just one criminal and not a whole family of them.”

Dipper smiled slightly at the reference, remembering the first villain they’d taken down together. It had been a group of five identical brothers, stacked on top of each other as

they pretended to be a giant. It was hard enough having one twin— he couldn't imagine having three more.

Sensing he was softening, Mabel scampered around the room, picking up random discarded souvenirs she'd picked up during their adventures. Donning a witch's hat, she cackled. "All the halloween candy shall be mine!"

"I think he was a little creepier than that, Mabel," Dipper snorted. Her imitation was terrible.

"As creepy as the zombies?" she drawled, shambling towards him.

"That was a poisonous gas." Despite her inaccuracies, Dipper chuckled. It was hard not to; for however ridiculous Mabel could be sometimes, she always knew how to make him laugh. Picking up a top hat, he said in a falsetto, "I'm Gideon, and I'm going to hypnotize you."

"Ugh." Mabel grimaced. "Not him!"

"Sorry." He wasn't sorry. Well, not entirely. Dropping the hat, he walked over to the half-open window. A warm breeze wafted in, stirring the curtains. It'd be a hot night. Which meant his costume was going to smell again. Honestly, he'd thought that being a superhero would be more fun, and not... so mundane.

Just outside the window, the sun had started to set. Unlike the city, the stars here were in the sky, not the ground. The citizens were so scattered, it was hard to spot their neighbour's lights, let alone the whole town's. Unfortunately, that made patrolling really long and difficult; there was just so much space to cover.

"Hey," Dipper asked quietly, "Do you think they're hiding something from us?"

Mabel stood next to him, looking at him seriously. "What do you mean?"

"Remember we found those two mysterious books, with the handprint on them?" Dipper explained, rubbing his forearms.

"Grunkle Ford just kinda took them." She leaned against the window. "I wonder why?"

"I saw Grunkle Stan with one of them. I think he took one." Dipper frowned. It felt like he

had almost all the pieces as to a bigger mystery, but he was missing a key one. "There must be something important in them."

"When we get the third one, we keep it, and then we can ask them anything," Mabel suggested confidently, hand on her hip. When she said it like that, he didn't doubt her words for an instant.

Dipper nodded. It was a solid enough plan. "I just don't get why they keep wanting us to work alone, and not together." He gestured out the window, at the tops of the buildings in the distance. "We can't patrol all of that on our own. Can you imagine fighting Gideon or someone else by yourself?"

Mabel didn't say anything, for a long moment, before turning to him. "You know, the Grunkles don't talk."

"Huuh?" Dipper stared at her blankly, not following. He dropped his arm. "They talk all the time."

"They don't, not like we do." She played with the hem of her sweater. It was a nervous gesture completely unlike her. "They don't even like staying in the same room."

Now that he thought about it, that was true. Whenever one walked in, the other would walk out. Dipper rubbed his chin, "Even when we're training, they keep insisting on different times."

"Yeah." Mabel sighed, her shoulders slumping. "Superheroes are supposed to be partners, why aren't they partners?"

Dipper couldn't handle a sad Mabel. It just wasn't right. Wrapping an arm around her, he squeezed her tight. "We're partners."

"Yeah." She smiled at him, perking up at the thought. "We'll be like Batman and Robin or Captain and Bucky." Getting into it, she spread her hands in front of her as though to show the grandness of the name she picked out. "Mabel and Dipper."

"Wouldn't that make me the sidekick?" Dipper replied dryly, letting go.

"The cool one is always the leader." Mabel winked at him as she slipped back to her dresser.



"You're not cool at all," he mumbled under his breath.

Still, this could work. Unlike the Grunkles, he and Mabel would work together. And maybe, just maybe, they could figure out what happened between them and protect the town at the same time. Dipper hadn't been sure about this whole superhero business—they'd constantly flopped from one danger to the next—but they could do it. Besides, they were helping people, what could go wrong?

"What do you think of this sweater?" Mabel asked, picking out a neon green sweater from her pile. Her smile was only outshone by how bright her sweater was. It was almost blinding.

Dipper didn't know where to begin. "Aren't we supposed to be stealthily?" He paused. "What, Grunkle Stan isn't giving you a costume?"

"Nah." Mabel shrugged her shoulders as she dropped the sweater and picked up another one that looked like the setting sun. At least it was kinda toned down. "He said a real hero makes their costume from scratch."

Dipper had a big feeling that it had less to do with character-building and more to do with Grunkle Stan being really lazy.

Either way, he was going to go out patrolling with a partner that could blind their enemies. Maybe he should start stuffing some flashlights and other survival gear into his many pockets. They were definitely going to need it.











# Portal to Relativity

By Nour386

Mabel ran through the woods, a tree branch scraping the sleeve of her sweater, but she didn't have the time to worry about it. With any luck the government agents that had arrested her would be halfway to the state border, not that was her biggest concern at the moment. Her watch beeped, and she felt herself become weightless for a moment. It wasn't long; she returned to the ground a moment later, and if she wanted to she could pretend she had jumped higher than she had expected. However, Mabel knew she hadn't the luxury to pretend that it was the truth.

She reached into her pocket and withdrew a packet of extra sugar filled pop-rocks. She was going to need the sugar rush, especially in her old age. The shack was coming into sight through the trees. Normally she'd have taken the main road, but for once, Mabel didn't want to take that gamble. As the clearing of the shack grew near, she slowed down— no point in getting caught just before the finish line—and thank goodness not a single suited jerk was in sight.

"Musta been called back," she muttered.

The screen door was left open, not unexpected, considering how quick the cars were to chase her decoy. This was the opportunity she needed.

"Alright," Mabel whispered to herself, tip-toeing into the gift shop. "I've still got a minute or two. I can totally cook a welcome back cake in that—"

She stopped in her tracks when she saw the vending machine and the door it hid wide open.

"Oh no." Mabel ran for the secret door to the basement. "I'll have to put the cake on hold."

She ran through the door and down the stairs three at a time. Her joints ached as she jumped down the last few steps on her way to the elevator. There was a small 'ding' as it arrived. The pink carpet and stickers that decorated the wall were a small comfort as Mabel stared down her watch, willing herself quicker to the bottom floor.

With another small 'ding' Mabel arrived and ran out of the lift.

"Don't touch that button!" Mabel cried as she barrelled into the basement.



Of all days to have such horrid luck. It was only a few hours ago when she and the kids were playing with fireworks and water balloons. The government agents were one problem (the sheriff and his deputy were not), but what she found in the basement was the last thing she had wanted to deal with at the moment. Whoever was playing with their lives, whether it be fate, the roll of a cosmic die, or Paul Banyan, they definitely had a twisted sense of humour.

Three pairs of eyes stared her down from across the room. Standing tall over them was the cold triangle shaped portal machine that Mabel had spent so long repairing. The cold blue glow from the portal's centre was a small comfort when compared to the harsh red button that stood between Stanley, Stanford and Fiddleford. Stanley had his hand raised over the button, a hateful glint in his eye warning Mabel that he wasn't joking.

"Stanley, back away from the button. You gotta trust me." She walked cautiously towards the group.

"And I should trust you why?" Stanley spat. "After you stole radioactive waste? After you lied to us all summer? I thought you actually cared! But you're just like the rest of those rotten adults!"

"Look I know this all seems cray-cray but I need that machine to stay on. If you just let me explain—" a loud beep came from Mabel's wristwatch. "Uh-oh. Brace yourselves."

The blue light of the portal opened to reveal a vast and star-filled void. The portal crackled and sparked, shaking the support beams and equipment in the room. The feeling of weightlessness made everyone shout in shock as they were pulled up from the ground. In moments, all four were thrown around the room.

"Stanley!" Stanford cried. His foot had caught on to a loose cable and was currently floating in the centre of the room.

"Stanford, quick! Shut it down!" Stanley pointed. His Twin nodded and pulled himself down to the button.

"No!" Mabel cried, pushing off against the back wall, swimming her way through the air towards the boy as Stanford pulled himself down to the shutdown button. "Stop!"

Fiddleford tackled the old con-woman, pushing her off course from Stanford.

"Fiddleford what are you doing? I gave you an order!" Mabel cried, flailing wildly to try and throw the thin boy off her body.

"I got new orders now Ms. Pines, if'n that is your real name, and that's savin' the world." Fiddleford cried, holding on to her for dear life.

"Fiddleford you idiot, let me go!" Mabel struggled.

Stanley kicked off the wall and slammed into Mabel.

"Sixer push the button! Shut it down—" He cried, shoving his hand into Mabel's face.

Stanford looked between his struggling Aunt and his determined brother, his mind blank as he tried to calculate the optimal route. But with the blaring count down and loud deafening noise from the portal his mind couldn't find anything to grasp on to. The evidence against her was damning, but something was out of place. The arguments fit together as Stanley claimed, but it didn't sit right, like when they would force a puzzle together when they couldn't find all pieces. He tightened his grip on the button as he thought, trying to figure out the right choice to make.

"No you can't, you gotta trust me!" Mabel pushed Stan back. The last 30 years flashed before her eyes as she reached out to her nephew.

"Grauntie Mabel, I don't even know if you're really my Auntie." Stanford sobbed. His tears floated up off his cheeks, plinking quietly off his glasses which were floating above him. "I want to believe you but—"

"Then listen! Stanford, remember this afternoon? When I said I had something to tell the both of you?" Mabel's sentence was cut off as another shockwave was sent through the room; throwing Stanley, Fiddleford, and herself against the far wall.

Stanford blinked away his tears in time to see his twin brother splayed against the wall. With the countdown blaring overhead, he tightened his fist and aimed for the button.

"I was going to say," Mabel coughed, "That you're going to hear some bad things about me. And some of them are true! But trust me, everything I've worked for, everything I care about! It's all for this family!"

"She's gotta be lying." Stanley interrupted. "This thing could destroy everything. You're the smart one, think about it!"

"Look into my eyes Stanford, Do you really think I'd hurt you?" Mabel begged.

"She's just like the rest of them. Turn it off now!"

"Stanford please!"

Stanford looked up at his great aunt and, despite the tears that fogged up the edge of his vision, he could see her face. Mabel looked at him with a gaze he'd never seen her wear before. It was as though she was putting all of her hopes on to him. He recognised the fear in her eyes, the hope, and the mix of emotions as she stared at him. Stanford recognised the face she wore, he'd seen it numerous times on his own brother's face throughout their adventures that summer.

For once, the mask his great aunt wore slipped, and what Stanford saw was someone in need of trust.

"Grauntie Mabel." Stanford let go, floating into the air. "I trust you."

"Sixer have you flipped your lid? We're all gonna d—" Stanley's cry was silenced by a deafening roar from the machine.

A blinding light filled the room.

There was a heavy silence in the air as Stanley rubbed his head; he could feel a fresh lump forming at the back of his head. He quickly surveyed the room and found that the basement littered with debris and broken machinery that didn't survive the portal opening. On the far side of the room his brother fumbled along the ground. Stanley took a step forward, and heard a crack. Beneath his foot were Stanford's rounded frame glasses.

"Stanley?" Stanford looked around. "I can't find my glasses. Everything just looks grey."

"I get 'em right here, smart guy," Stanley walked over. He pulled out his own glasses from his pocket and handed them over.

The sound of heavy footsteps drew the attention of the twins to the portal. A man with greying hair and dark clothes stepped out from the wreckage into the basement. The other occupants of the room watched in stunned silence as he wordlessly walked through the basement. He stopped just short of a blue leather-bound journal. On the front cover was a silver sticker: the big dipper constellation, with a number one drawn on. The man's face reflected in the sticker as he stared down at the journal. He knelt down to pick it up, moving the reflection from his face to the big dipper birthmark on his forehead.

"Who is that?" Stanford asked.

"The author of the journals," Mabel said in disbelief. She watched the man take off his scarf and goggles to reveal a face just like hers. "My brother."













@Zannolin

# Magic in the Center of Everything

By Starry

The Pines are accustomed to seeing many strangers over the various summers they spend in Gravity Falls, but there's nothing quite like watching a family exit their car and know that they've experienced *something* in their lives.

Before they left on a previous summer trip, Ford had stated that if you had been touched by magic and looked hard enough at a person, you could see if they'd been tainted by the supernatural. The Pines themselves could especially see if someone like them were around, since Gravity Falls was soaked in glamour and the townsfolk co-existed with the monsters that came around.

So when Dipper and Mabel unpack in their room for the next year and settle back into the Mystery Shack, they say hello to everyone they know with bright smiles and eagerly await the burst of tourists. Soos opens up the doors, greeting customers with a wave of the staff and adjustment of the eyepatch just like Stan had taught him.

Despite the Shack's change in owners, this year is no different. Tourists filter through the door and admire the sights that they'd traveled miles to see, even as fake as they were. Dipper listens to whispers and tales of the Gobblewonker again and shakes his head with a smile, wondering for a moment if McGucket is up to his old tricks again.

And then, he hears this.

"Wow! I wonder if he has a name; do you think the Gobblewonker will mind if I give him a name? Maybe he's royalty, I should add 'the First' after it. Or 'the Second'? Hey, Wirt, do you think Mom will let us head off to the lake to see if we can find it—"

"No, Greg. Do you know how many times we've had these talks? We're both supposed to stay near the Shack, the town, and our hotel. That's all we're here for, alright? No more supernatural stuff."

Oh, these poor people. Dipper rounds the corner of the countertop where Wendy's station is with a witty reply on the tip of his tongue and remarks, "Funny you should mention supernatural—"

Oh.

Two boys in a t-shirt and sweater vest turn to face him, and Dipper's face slowly goes pale as he realizes *exactly* what he's staring at.

Dipper doesn't often bother looking for other people's glamour. It's not relevant to any of his current research; this is more of Mabel's area of expertise that comes along with her barrage of questions, eyes lighting up when she jumps around and demands answers while the unlucky tourist has to fend off an excited Mabel Pines.

But these two...

It's a black sludge that coats their shoulders, dripping down their clothes. The younger one, Greg if Dipper had to guess, tips his head to the side and looks moderately confused even as a glob of goo slides down to his palms. The older one, Wirt, looks taken aback as the multicolored rings in his sclera glow an unnatural shade of red, blue, and yellow. Dipper's had lots of practice looking creatures directly in the eye, but his gaze travels to the antlers that twine together and stick up directly from the boy's short brown hair.

"Ah," Dipper stammers, holding his palms up as he retreats backwards. "Sorry! Didn't mean to eavesdrop, I was just curious about your, uh, Gobblewonker plans! Sorry to bother you!"

That should be the end of it. And Dipper genuinely does his best, he really does, but as soon as he turns away, a hand grabs his arm. "Hold on a sec!" Greg says, practically bouncing in his spot. "You look like a man who would know the name of the Gobblewonker; do you think he's got one? Is there a reason why there's a huge UFO above the town? Have you ever met a talking frog?"

"Greg," Wirt interrupts, giving Dipper an awkward smile as an apology. "We talked about personal boundaries. Leave the poor guy alone."

"It's okay," Dipper replies, mind still running a million miles an hour. He's never met *anyone* with glamour like this; a few people who had seen ghosts and demons had faint, static images curled around them. The amount of tourists that had been fae-touched and lived to tell the tale usually had iron on their bodies in the form of jewelry, tight-lipped with their names and constantly nervous.

But *this*.



...He hates to admit it, but he may need backup.

"Hold on a sec," Dipper stops the two from leaving. "I work here with my sister, and she'd love to answer your questions! Just gimme a moment to call her."

"Sweet!" Greg responds, immediately spinning on his heel and pointing out the knick-knacks on the wall. "Wirt, look! A monkey fish!"

"That looks fake," Wirt complains as Dipper tunes them out. His shaking hands wrap around the pig whistle he has in his vest pocket. He turns and blows as fast as he can into it; the entire Shack knows that if Waddles gets alerted, there's a high chance that Mabel's close by. He gives their arrival about a minute and turns back to the two. The image is already wavering; he's growing used to their auras, so he'll have to focus to call up the shadows.

There's an unspoken rule in the town that you call the Pines for any help you need. They call for Dipper when they need a mediator between creatures, and they call Mabel for pretty much anything else. However, the smartest choice is to call both on the off-chance that they'll fix an extra problem on their way home.

Even with growing older, Dipper and Mabel Pines became a powerhouse duo. There's almost nothing they can't solve together and they're more than capable of running the entire Mystery Shack, if only to give Soos a break to spend time with Melody and for Wendy, who stops in as often as she can.

In the summer, Gravity Falls is their home. There's no other word for it.

Right on cue, Mabel comes skidding in with her infamous grappling hook strapped to her sweater, Waddles right behind. "What seems to be the problem, broski—"

Her eyes go huge, jaw dropping. There's a moment where it looks like she's frozen in place. Mabel recovers far quicker than Dipper did (because of course she does) and marches forward, hand thrust out for a handshake. "Mabel Pines, at your service!" She declares brightly. "So! What supernatural entity have you dealt with? We'll help you get rid of it, free of charge!"

"What?" Wirt recoils, eyebrows furrowing as he takes in the taller twin. This summer, Mabel's an inch over Dipper and she never fails to boast about it even in their third week in town. It's a bit strange to actually have to look up to someone her own age, and Mabel's finds that

she really doesn't like being looked down on. *At least I'm taller than Dipper*, she reasons, and resolves to pat Dipper on his curly hair later.

"Supernatural?" Greg asks, tapping a finger to his cheek. It takes him a moment to recall a past memory, face scrunching up in thought. "Oh! You mean the Beast, right? That was years ago and we definitely got rid of him, or at least Wirt did! One measly old lantern trick that got us out of the Unknown!"

Poor Wirt looks gobsmacked as he looks between both twins, rubbing his eyes. "Please don't tell me you know of the...y'know, him." He begs. Dipper recognizes the signs of anxiety in the way that Wirt grips his forearms and digs his nails in; a way to keep himself grounded, clearly. Greg obviously has no such tics as he rambles on about scissors and bluebirds, eyes bright with memories he should not look fondly back on.

And of course, Dipper *does* understand not wanting to say its name. It makes the experience personal and not acknowledging it is their best chance to continue their day. There's a reason that the statue deep in the woods has a tarp wrapped tightly around it, and why the Pines twins both try to avoid anything with burning yellow eyes. Giving *him* a name brings back memories they both don't want with nightmares that have Dipper staying awake for days on end and Mabel screaming when she feels cold chains wrapping around her throat and body.

Dipper clears his throat and answers honestly, "No, we don't know of it. But we specialize in helping spirits and creatures as best we can. Anything weird is technically right up our alley."

"Don't you know where you're at?" Mabel chimes in, throwing her hands in the air. Her bright pink nails glint as she presses her pointer into her cheek, grinning brightly. "You're in Gravity Falls, home of the supernatural and the Pines family! It's also really ironic because gravity *did* technically fall at some point here. We're still trying to see if we can do it again and have a zero gravity day."

"I figured the name was just a terrible physics joke," Wirt mutters, jaw clenching as he looks down at his shadow lit by the overhead lights. "And regardless of your experiences, I doubt they were as horrifying as ours. Ever been in Purgatory?"

"Had my soul ripped out of my body and controlled like a puppet," Dipper immediately fires back. "Next?"

Greg's eyes go huge as Mabel slides him a stool, settling down on it. "We've been through a lot of weird stuff," Mabel says cheerfully in the midst of their teenager circle. "Demons, ghosts, creatures, end of the world and all that. Trust us, sweetie, we've done a *lot*. So with that out of the way, what's the Unknown and why'd it leave such a lasting impression on the two of you?"

"Greg," Wirt says helplessly, and Dipper feels a bit bad at the way his hands flail before settling back on his arms. "Please, don't. I just want a normal summer with a normal life and not think about those *freaking* eyes—"

"Sorry, Wirt." Greg says apologetically. The younger boy looks downcast as he scuffs the floorboards with his shoe. "I think we should tell them. I still spit leaves sometimes and we both can't get the oil smell out of our clothes. Maybe you should tell them about the tree thing you keep doing too."

There's clearly a huge story that Dipper's eager to unravel. His hand creeps to the pen he keeps on hand in his pocket and feels relieved that this one isn't chewed up, a habit that Mabel does her best to still break. Mabel herself looks fascinated but thankfully restrains herself from pushing forward and asking more questions.

Wirt looks genuinely upset and Dipper narrows his eyes, focusing on the shimmering image of a lantern at his feet. It whispers and calls to Dipper if he listens hard enough, but upon realizing what name it calls instead he jerks away, doing his best to focus on the brand new page he's opened his journal up to.

Dipper isn't exactly like Ford, which is a blessing in its own right, and Mabel definitely makes sure of that. He does, however, take after his style of recording and jotting down notes. He had personally created his own faded parchment and lovingly binded it together with blue leather instead of the cracked red that *he* had destroyed so long ago. Instead of gold, the edges are coated in silver, Dipper's own personal mark.

And yes, it's also covered in scratch 'n sniff stickers from Mabel. At this point of his life, Dipper doesn't really care if he loses street credit for it, since it still gets the job done and smells amazing in the process.

"Can we talk about this somewhere else?" Wirt whispers into the silence. "I—I wasn't expecting to go into this again for the rest of my life and it's—it's kind of a lot to deal with. Just," he gestures helplessly again, "just give me a few hours, please."

"Of course," Mabel says immediately. "We both saw the glamour you had and it just caught our attention. We've never met anyone like you two! Traumatic Backstory squad!"

"Mabel," Dipper groans as Greg tries not to laugh and fails miserably, "we are *not* calling ourselves that. That's a horrible name anyways."

"Well whaddya wanna call them, Dipstick?" She points towards the duo, eyebrows raising. "Elephant and Gnome? Something else?" And sure enough, if Dipper attempts to focus, he can see a gray kettle settled like a crown on Greg's hair, a long red gnome hat perched precariously on Wirt's ears. A deep navy cloak with golden buttons curls itself around Wirt's body, almost like a second shadow.

"Wh—" Wirt's head snaps down so fast, Dipper's actually worried if he has whiplash. "*How do you keep doing this?*" On his other side, Greg looks shocked and then fascinated at the remnants of an old memory lingering on them. "Cool!"

Dipper takes a deep breath. They're both clearly listening, but it's been awhile since anyone's actually believed him. "We've been in this town with our grunkles for a few summers now. From our own experience with creatures, we've been around long enough that the magic of his town is soaking into us."

"Is it dangerous?" Greg wonders, looking down at his clothes like he can see the magic lingering. "Is there magic going into us *right now?*"

"Probably?" Mabel admits. "But once you leave Gravity Falls, a good majority of it fades! It sticks with us because we're here a lot. Because of that, we help creatures as best we can! We've helped ghosts and gnomes and a lot more on the list."

"And everyone who's been in contact with these creatures will have an aura around them," Dipper explains. "Most of them are really faint, but when you guys walked in, it was one of the strongest I've seen so far, and my Grunkle Ford has been around creatures for well over half his life. What the heck happened to both of you?"

"What do you see when you look at us?" Greg interrupts, not looking at Wirt, who's frozen solid. "I'm gonna guess some horrible monster with holes in it that look like faces?"



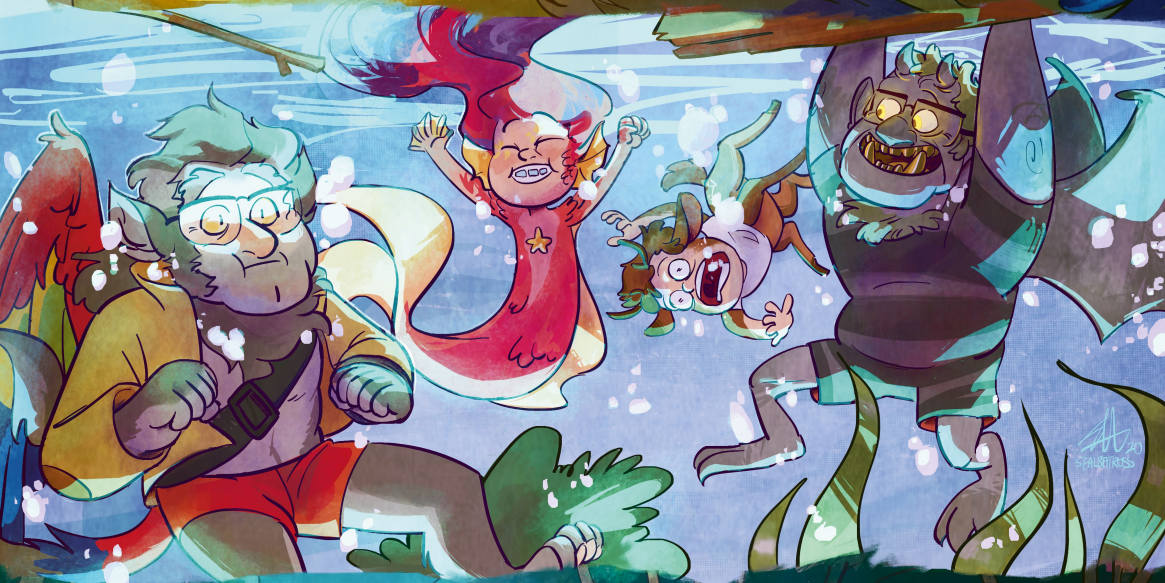
"You were passed out for that," Wirt says hoarsely, turning to look at his younger half-brother with horror in his eyes. "*You should not be able to remember that, Gregory Palmer.*"

Greg gives a small shrug that shows his discomfort even more so. "I see it in my nightmares a lot."

There's a silence that falls before Mabel breaks it with a low whistle. "Nah, nothing like that. We see a whole lot of oil, twigs, some costumes, and a lantern. Wirt, you've got antlers and your eyes are really weird."

Wirt puts a shaking hand over his mouth like he's going to be sick. Greg just nods and seems to accept his fate quite easily, his childish demeanor melting away into something serious.

"Well," Dipper announces, like they didn't just stumble upon one of the greatest mysteries they'd ever have to solve. "We can talk over a platter of food at Greasy's Diner; we'll pay and discuss our options. It definitely looks like you guys are gonna need some of Lazy Susan's famous breakfast pancakes to get through this conversation."







# What We Would Undo

By Inabsurd

The lamp is one of the least interesting things in his room- or, it appears to be- and Ford is counting on that to keep his family and the others who frequent the area safe. The room is littered with a thousand other nicknacks that his brother couldn't bear to keep in sight, so Ford thinks the odds are rather in his favour. Things even seem to go that way for a while; the electron carpet he developed keeps them occupied for all of a day and surely the mishaps *that* causes will make them wary of any other suspicious items in the room.

It doesn't, not really, but the lamp is ordinary in comparison and there's so much clutter in his old room that the kids bypass it entirely for many days.

Unfortunately, their lack of interest doesn't escape Cipher's notice in the slightest. He must be watching from within his vessel, must be learning about his niblings even without being present, because Dipper enters Ford's old room to look for some spare graphing paper and where the lamp previously sat rests a computer, not unlike the kind Fiddleford was developing.

Ford finds he's always cold, but the sensation somehow worsens as his nephew picks the thing up and an all too familiar curiosity glints in the boy's eyes. In that moment, the scientist knows that unless he can physically take the thing from Dipper- and he *can't*, Bill made sure he'd never be able to interfere again- his nephew is going to meet the same end he did.

Bill doesn't make his move right away. His nephew powers up the laptop- *that's what this style is called now*- that should be long dead and gazes on a very standard password input screen. Frowning, Dipper types in his first guess.

A rather aggressive tone rings out, accompanied by an "incorrect password" notification.

Ford frowns. Though he is uncertain if the djinn can actually hear from in there, he asks, "What's your game, Bill?"

Next to him, Dipper attempts another password, only for the same message to pop up. A determined light makes its home on Dipper's face and then it *clicks*.

Dipper is as relentlessly curious as Stanford himself was, before Bill tinged everything with danger and deceit. Making this "laptop" a challenge is only going to build his nephew's intrigue and make him want whatever he finds there even more. It's the perfect manipulation, really.



When Bill finally does make an appearance, Dipper won't expect the creature to have any ill intentions because he'll have seemed so disinterested in showing himself prior to.

If only Ford had caught onto Bill's routine thirty years ago instead of now when he physically can't do anything to stop him.

This goes on for *days* and, as Dipper's sleepless hours continue to stack up, Ford's anxiety only grows. Finally, the computer beeps almost mundanely. For a moment, Ford can trick himself into thinking it's just another incorrect entry. Just a moment.

Then the room fills with laughter, high-pitched, reedy, and absolutely manic. It's taunting and malicious and *how did I ever think this thing was my friend?*

"Bill, leave him alone!"

Dipper doesn't hear him—no person has in years—but Bill turns his single eye on Ford for just a moment and blinks pointedly, something Ford has learned to recognize as his twisted version of a wink. Then, with deliberate slowness, he turns on Ford's nephew, shrouding the boy in his shadow, though Dipper doesn't seem to notice.

"Wow! You're..." The boy pauses, face scrunching up in confusion. "Geometry?"

"I PREFER EQUILATERAL, ACTUALLY." Bill circles his nephew a scant few inches from the boy's face. "AND YOU PREFER DIPPER OVER 'MASON', AND 'PINE TREE', AND 'MY PERSONAL FLESH PUPPET', BUT THAT'S NEITHER HERE NOR THERE. WE'RE HERE TO GET YOU SOME WISH FULFILMENT."

"What?"

His nephew is, understandably, a little lost. Bill's always been a fast talker; it's how he hides his maliciousness when he doesn't feel like being a conniving traitor.

Bill just smiles, eye upturned. "YOUR WISHES, KID. KINDA PART OF THE WHOLE GENIE GIG."

Dipper squints at the thing. "A genie? I didn't think you'd be so, uh, equilateral," he says slowly. "Are all genies triangles?"

*"Fascinating! Is this your primary form?" Ford prods at the genie's rough surface. "I read that djinn were humanoid."*

"IS THAT A WISH, PINE TREE?" Bill flares a subtle red and Ford flinches instinctively.

*"YOU'LL HAVE TO WISH FOR IT IF YOU WANT ANSWERS, SIXER."*

No, there's no way this ends well. Ford's seen this before, *lived* this before, and he—

...Well, his incorporeal form really explains it all. Bill destroyed his body just to make a *pun*. Who knows what terrible plans he has for Dipper?

Luckily, Ford has managed one good thing, at least.. His nephew's been toting around his journal for the past month and so he's taken Ford's final message to heart all on his own. He waves his hands frantically. "No, no, no—"

The scientist's heart swells with pride. *He'll be fine. He'll be great. He's going to destroy Bill where I couldn't—*

"Not yet, anyway."

Ford deflates.

"So what're the rules here?" Dipper goes on. His hand drifts to his vest pocket to seek out the pen Ford knows he stores within. "Is it the standard three wishes or is that, like, a Disney thing? Just, how does this work?" Then he tacks on, "And why were you in a computer? How long have you even been here?"

"WOW, YOU SURE HAVE A WHOLE LOT OF QUESTIONS, DON'TCHA, KID? REMINDS ME OF THE LAST GUY I WORKED WITH." He shoots a cheeky look in Ford's direction, or maybe it's straight-up smug. He can't really tell through the sudden red that clouds his vision, which only darkens when Bill places an amicable hand on his nephew's shoulder.

"Didn't you take enough from me already?" Ford's voice is hard as steel with a glare to match. "You don't get to drag anyone else into my mess."

Bill just conjures a pair of lips where his eye usually is and uses it to stick his tongue out at Ford. Dipper misses that particular act, held in place as he is, although he strains his neck as best he can to try to face the thing that's subtly manhandling him. "The last guy?"

"YEAH, THE LAST GUY. REAL SMARTY-PANTS, HIM. GIANT PAIN IN MY ANGLE TOO."

His nephew takes in this information, a triumphant little grin pulling at his face as he realizes the implications of the statement and reconciles it with the other puzzle pieces he's collected over the summer. "You mean the Author? He was *here*?"

Bill's eye flashes suddenly to a billion different things he's seen in his time. The images are fuzzy like the screen of Stan's old TV, but Stanford can still pick out his own face on several occasions, as well as the six-fingered insignia he embossed his journals with.

"SURE, THE AUTHOR. HE WAS THE LAST ONE I DID BUSINESS WITH. BEEN A LONG WHILE SINCE I HAD A CHANCE TO STRETCH." At this, Bill pulls horizontally from his two side angles and fills the entire perimeter of Ford's room before returning to his normal size with a snap not unlike the release of an elastic band. "SO, WHAT DO YA WANT, PINE TREE? I'M JUST ITCHING TO GET MY MAGIC FLOWING AGAIN."

*"IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE BEEN OUT. YOU AND ME, I.Q., WE'RE GONNA GET ALONG GREAT."*

*"We are?"*

*"OF COURSE WE ARE. NOW LET'S MAKE SOME MAGIC, I'M FEELING PRETTY RESTLESS FROM GOING SO LONG BETWEEN JOBS."*

Another one of Bill's tricks, it would seem: make the victim think they're doing him a favour. In some strange, backwards way, maybe they are. Bill can't interact with the world without someone owning his lamp, after all.

"Can you tell me about the Author?" Dipper leans forward eagerly and Ford is slammed with the wish that they weren't so similar. He's yet to see the boy leave a mystery alone.

Bill smirks and Ford has to wonder if he ever stopped, "SAY THE MAGIC WORDS, KID, OTHERWISE I CAN'T DO A THING."

"That's not even true!" Ford yells. Whether he's more fed up with Bill or afraid for his nephew, he can't really tell, but, either way, he wants this all to come to an end.

"WHAT? YOU DIDN'T REALLY THINK I WAS BEING HELD BACK, DIDJA? NOTHING CAN STOP ME, SIXER, THE ONLY THING I'M BEHOLDEN TO IS **ME**."

Dipper pauses for only a moment. "I wish you'd tell me about the Author?"

Bill flares once more, lava red one moment to an obsidian black in the next. "THE AUTHOR, EH? SURE THING, KID."

Ford feels his stomach turn to lead inside of him. There's so much *history* between him and the djinn. He is all-knowing and personally responsible for ruining his life; the last thing he wants talking to his nephew is Bill.

"You have nothing to gain from this," he tries to point out, but Bill just ignores him. It hurts more than it should considering he doesn't even *like* the djinn, but Bill is the only creature on the planet still capable of seeing him and that makes rejection hard to handle.

"THE AUTHOR, THE AUTHOR...WHERE TO START?"

Dipper is practically vibrating. "How about his name?" He frames it like a suggestion but Ford can tell it is taking all of the boy's self-control not to push Bill again.

Bill shrugs. "SURE. HIS NAME'S STANFORD PINES. HE'S IN THIS HOUSE RIGHT NOW!"

That—

Ford doesn't know why he expected anything less than misdirection, anything less than *lies*. Bill tells them as if it's more natural than the truth, but he can't think about that right now, not when Dipper looks so...so—

"Stan *lied* to me? *I knew it!* No way you can live in this town for, like, forty years and *not* know about the supernatural! Why would he hide that?"

Ford can't help but wonder, is this how he looked when Stan broke his project? Is this how he looked when Bill took it too far? Bitterness pulling at his too-young face and a thousand



unnamed hurts dancing in his eyes?

Stan *has* lied to Dipper, Ford's seen it enough times, but Bill is twisting words and hiding truths in blindspots Dipper doesn't even know he *has*. Ford's tries to feel rage for the djinn in Dipper's place, but, instead, lands on something closer to sorrow.

"GUY'S A LIAR, KID, WHAT CAN I SAY?" Bill shrugs, like he *hasn't* sent his nephew and his learned trust issues off the deep end. Bill smirks. "WHATCHA WANNA DO ABOUT THAT?"

"Do about what?" Dipper asks, distracted by his own fuming.

"YOUR UNCLE, PINE TREE, KEEP UP."

He flinches, just a little. "My uncle—" Realization dawns on his face. "What, no, we're not gonna —"

Bill's eye grows in size, stretching to fill most of his face. "AND WHY NOT?" he leers. "HE'S BEEN PLAYING YOU ALL SUMMER, KID. YOU CAN'T SAY HE HASN'T EARNED SOME PAYBACK."

Dipper scowls and scuffs a shoe. "Well, yeah, sure, but—"

"BUT NOTHIN'. YOU SAID YOURSELF HE DESERVES IT, SO LET'S **GIVE HIM WHAT HE DESERVES.**"

Dipper shrinks in on himself, shivering almost violently at the sudden chill as the room plunges into darkness. Ford can't feel the cold himself; he can't feel much of anything at all, really, except for the growing horror that writhes within him.

"**STAN PINES HAS BEEN CAUSING ME PROBLEMS FOR TOO LONG.**" Bill's gone blood-red in the dim lighting, casting eerie shadows over Dipper's face in ways that makes his mouth gape unnaturally and eyeless sockets squeeze shut tight in fear. "HE'S TOO STUPID TO REALIZE HE'S ALREADY LOST WHAT HE'S AFTER. **LET ME HELP THE GUY OUT.**"

He looks at Ford with purpose at that, a very singular intent to his gaze.

"Help him—" he sputters. "Bill, leave my family alone! They haven't done anything to you!"

Stanley has already paid far too much for Ford's screw-ups. He used to blame his brother for forcing him to attend a second-rate college because it was all he could afford, for the fact that he ever met Bill at all, but now he's too tired for that. Stan's spent the past thirty *years* looking for answers about what happened to him and Ford...well, if their roles had been reversed, Ford would never have known.

And Dipper—Mabel, even, who isn't involved yet but there's not so much as a speck of hope within Ford that makes him think she'll be spared from whatever Bill has coming—they're too young to be implicated in any of this. They did nothing wrong but bear their great uncle's surname.

Ford remembers the day he met Bill, but, more than that, he remembers when it all went wrong. He remembers when he made his *foolish* final wish.

*I wish I wasn't seen as a freak.*

He knew Bill for less than a month when he made that wish, and it ruined his entire life.


*And now, he thinks, it's going to ruin their lives too.*

And for what? What did he get for his involvement with Bill? Answers? Yes, for a time, but recognition? Self-fulfilment on *any* level? No, and he lost it all on his own because he was too naive and insecure to think that Bill could have any other motive for interacting with him.

In many ways, Dipper's a lot like him, and a lot like Stan in others. He's seen the boy be vindictive, he's seen him put aside his own feelings for the sake of his sister, he's seen curiosity get the better of him even when the warning signs blaze in his face. Dipper wants to prove himself, feels like he *needs* to prove himself; how exactly he'll go about that, though, is something Ford can't guess at with any certainty. Not when Dipper doesn't know the truth of what Bill is.

"SO, KID, WHAT'LL IT BE?"





So  
Many  
Falls  
2021